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John 18-28
1 Cor 2

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Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a King then? Jesus answered: Thou sayest that I am a King. - To this end was I born & for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. -

Pilate saith unto him. what is truth?

John XVIII - 37. 38

Sharon [illegible] Feb 23 1873

Brooklin -

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The two characters whom this text introduces are in singular contrast. Not only are their outward positions widely apart - but ~~the whole~~ their minds in temper & tone ~~of their minds~~ - are radically different. -- The one was of the common people - born in obscurity - and reared without advantage of books or schools.

His nature ~~is~~ was intensely positive - and he so strongly affirmed the correctness of his own ideas - as ~~to~~ ~~sometimes~~ ~~seem~~ that he sometimes seemed even to dictate and dogmatize.

It was this faith in his perceptions of the true & right - which commissioned him to preach. His doctrines were nothing new nor wonderful - being only the sentiments which the better side of human nature has always prompted. The golden rule - the beatitudes - the doctrine of future rewards & punishments - ~~are~~ are simply voices from the best humanity of every age ~~and clime~~. - But these which to other men were dim & far off sounds - smothered by passion and desire - With Jesus were the clear trumpet tones of a commanding Deity. - He heard them so distinctly, above all the turmoil of life that the right & Justice which they proclaimed were, to him, the only realities - He came to bear witness to the truth, - not the truth as he had learned it sitting at the feet of doctors of the law - nor as he had gleaned it from books. - but the truth as it welled up in his own mind - ~~just as in every other mind. only more strong~~ and pure. - The moral sentiments - living at the basis of human nature, but which the world only vaguely perceived - or faintly grasped. asserted themselves through every nerve & fiber of ~~his~~ Christs being. -

The ideas which he taught - were to him self evident ~~axiomatic~~, - and he had no more doubt that they were Eternal verities than we have that two & two make four. -

This was the Man - teaching from an inward faith

[illegible]

so strong as to give authority to his every word, against whom the upholders of tradition had trumped up a charge of conspiracy against Caesar, and who had been brought before the Roman Governor for trial. The Jews accused him of declaring himself their King, which if true would have been a capital offense against the Roman power which held possession of the country. But Pilate questioning him ~~finds~~ found that his heart ~~is~~ was not at all set upon temporal affairs. While disdaining to make anything like a defense, Jesus replies to Pilate's questions that his Kingdom is not of this world, that he came to bear witness of the truth.

Pilate's answering question, which is perhaps more of an ejaculation, since he waited for no ~~proof~~ reply, betrays his character, & shows him ~~it~~ to ~~be~~ have been almost the exact opposite ~~of the young~~ of Jesus Jew ~~who stands~~ Stood before him. What is truth he exclaims, as who should say truth is a very harmless affair.— Pilate expected to find an ambitious young man — dreaming of freedom from foreign oppression — and of his own establishment upon an independent throne.— What he did find — was a teacher of religion & morals — who cared nothing for Kings & thrones but only for the truth.—— The Roman indicated by his final ~~[illegible]~~ response — that in his judgement ~~the~~ Jesus was ~~[illegible]~~ occupying himself with ~~a very~~ something very unreal & shadowy affair — and ~~wa~~ was therefore ~~about~~ alike ~~as~~ useless and harmless to the state] as though he ~~had~~ been ~~playing~~ ~~with~~ ~~soap~~ bubbles.—— ~~[illegible]~~ The question what is truth.— would betray that the questioner — was unable to affirm anything as absolutely true.—— In connection with the circumstances under which Pilate spoke — it betrays also.— a sort of contempt.— for any person narrow minded enough to think they have found the truth.- Here then are the two characters ~~then~~ the one positive & the other negative - Jesus the seer - whose whole nature unhesitatingly affirms the truth, of whatever his sense of the fitness of things declares.- Pilate the skeptic who through ~~a clear~~ the analysis of his thoughts - has learned that they are partly made up of errors - & therefore not to be entirely trusted,

The one affirms - the other doubts and denies - and both go to the farthest limit - in their respective mental directions.- seldom ~~will~~ does history bring together two such characters for our inspection.- Each so perfect of its kind.-

~~But they are~~ and these two characters are multiplied over & over again - in different shades & degrees - in this & every generation, - Though you find no one whose mind is either entirely - settled - or entirely unsettled upon all the ~~points~~ questions brought to his notice,- who is able to say I know the truth of everything I have investigated or must confess — I know the truth of nothing which I have investigated, — ~~still~~ still every person is a believer on some points and skeptical on others — and almost ~~every body~~ all ~~has~~ have ~~either~~ a habit either of affirming or questioning — which classes them with one of these historic characters. — There seems to be a native antipathy between the two classes — not seldom — passing into mutual contempt. — Thus the believer who asserts the truth from an interior feeling that it is right & proper. — whether ~~or not~~ that feeling be ~~intuition~~ what we call an intuition or (simply) the voice of prejudice. — thinks that ~~every body~~ all the world must see the same ~~truth~~ idea in the same way, & that whoever calls it in question is wilfully seeking to pervert the truth. — The skeptic who is inclined by nature (to distrust all intuitive perceptions & to inquire into the evidence upon which every belief rests — thinks that the believer is afraid of the of the truth & will not investigate.— Upon the question of the authority of scripture for example.— one of the antagonistic parties has been educated to believe without thinking, that the Bible is literally the word of God.— There never was a question in their minds that this is the truth.— nor can they understand how there should be an honest doubt upon the subject in anybodies mind— ~~unless they sought to disestablish the truth~~.— So they have plenty of contempt for the pronounced skeptics.— The other party with its natural inclination to go to the foundation of things.— demands the evidence that the Bible is any more divinely inspired than other good books.— and in the absence of what it regards as sufficient proof— entertains a very poor opinion of those who are willing to own to the authority of ~~[illegible]~~ a book— supported only by its own witness ~~to take the doctrine~~ without ~~evidence~~.— —

It does not suit my present purpose— to set up either type of mind as the highest,— enough that both exist & that there is a ~~radical~~ natural antagonism difference between them

Yet each does ill to impute to the other - any sinister design, or want of mental ability

natures of ~~the~~ skeptic ~~& believer~~.- The one affirms because ~~the~~ it comes perfectly natural for him to do so.- the other doubts for the same reason.-- That it is impossible to stop investigation & (shut a doubt out of the mind after it has once found entrance,- ~~every one~~ all who have doubted upon any subject whatsoever - well know ~~will bear me out in saying~~.- and that it is equally impossible to put a doubt into the mind which instinctively believes - I can equally well understand.- We are in this respect - what nature & circumstances have made us.-- Now having pointed out these two characters and habits of thought.- I ask you to notice that the skeptical is daily & hourly increasing in power over the other.- In this respect the age ~~is~~ seems to be growing away from Christ.- that whereas his annunciations of the truth came from an interior sense of what was true - a spiritual perception.- the mind of to-day places less & less reliance upon the ideas thus derived.- and is more & more inclined to take nothing without such external evidence.- ~~which~~ as shall be to it valid & satisfactory.- To any one at all familiar with the general course of events.- this statement requires no justification.- The growth of science & prevalence of scientific methods of thought.- the ~~newer~~ modern systems of education.- which teach the young to thoroughly investigate.- the rapid growth of a liberal party inside.- and a radical party outside the evangelical church.- all this shows that the 19th century is bent upon searching alike fact.- theory.- & revelation.- through & through.- Men are everywhere asking.- not only what is the truth of this & that particular thing.- but with Pilate.- what is truth?- What are the grounds upon which knowledge rests?- What can I know.- if anything.- for an absolute certainty?- The doubt of church authority.- which the reformation put into the human mind - was a lump of leaven in the the measure of meal. - & when once it began to work there was no checking the process half way. - -

It is just as idle to resist the tendency of an age - as to attempt to blow back the south wind. - - They who do not like to see the new ideas sprouting in their frozen fields of thought. - & who cry out against the innovating greenness of the new spring time. - may retire into their domicils. - close the doors - stir the fires ~~stir~~ up the ~~sulphurous~~ fires - and make themselves believe it is still winter. - But they can not build a fence high enough nor manufacture a counterblast - strong enough. to keep the south wind away from their out door possessions. - They may fume and fret - and talk about preaching the terrors - of the law - as one did at a preachers meeting down, in New York the other day - until one brother felt obliged to request the ~~brother~~ him not to use any more profane language. - But all is of no avail. - the warm, south wind of investigation ~~it thaws~~ is steadily blowing - & increasing in volume - It is thawing out every icy, artificial form which hinders growth - and allowing all the ancient ~~forms~~ beliefs & customs which retain vitality, all the living seed to germinate, - If investigation means the downfall of established creeds & religious systems, then down they go. - And I suppose if this should happen - they who have believed them imperishable would be ~~more~~ no more astonished - that the devout christians of Constantinople once were, - when the Arab appeared before their gates; - they put their trust in the images of Jesus & Mary; - the blessed saints & martyrs! - They did not believe it possible that ~~they~~ these images should suffer harm - for they had been taught ~~to believe~~, that whoever - lifted against them a ruthless hand - would fall dead at their feet. - Judge then of their astonishment - when the victorious Mohammedans crying out against

~~idolatry.- struck these divine Images to the ground.- without their resenting the insult - and when the general unharmed ascended the turrets of the church of St. Sophia.- and proclaimed over the city of the Trinity - that there is one God - & his prophet is Mohammed.-- I say, things accounted divine - prove ever this fallen - notwithstanding that men have implicitly trusted in them;~~ — But if on the other hand - the creeds of christendom are prepared to challenge criticism.- and will be only vindicated by investigation - then those creeds are on the high road to prosperity - For investigation will be had - whatever may be the issue.--- Meanwhile we may inquire what the issue is likely to be?- Whither is this resistless tide which we call the spirit of age - sweeping us?- Slowly we are torn from the old moorings - and drift out into the stream so ~~slowly~~ quietly that many who are far out of reach of their old anchorage.- do not even know that they are moving.-- One by one the age has passed the old landmarks.- And is now under such headway.- that ~~only~~ it can be stopped only at the expense of halting & wrecking modern civilization.--

Look backward to what we have left.- The belief in a personal devil- to whom the greater portion of the world was enslaved.- The belief in the election - and predestination of the few to eternal bliss - & the many to eternal woe.- in hell as a place of literal fiery torment.-- in infant damnation.- In a code of ideas The belief which made man in his natural state the basest of the animal creations - and God the embodyment of remorseless cruelty.- belief in all these things I say - was universally preached less than 75 years ago.- with no one to raise a dissenting voice.- Now shame in a presbyterian or congregational church which is at the same time a power in community and openly calvinistic.---

If I had grown up in the orthodox church— I might find plenty of congregations— before whom I could frankly speak my whole mind.— provided only I would use the old fashioned terms.— The Methodism of to day is almost wholly different from that of 40 years ago.—

If Dr Lyman Beecher— should come back to earth sit in the audience of his distinguished son— and hear him say, as he has said— almost in so many words— that the doctrine of Eternal punishment offended his judgement & reason.— would he dream that he listened to a man of congregational faith?—

The church is growing irresistably— whether fast or slow— & that is all I care to establish.---

When evangelical ministers admit within ranks— men who openly disallow belief in a literal Hell— who can tell what will happen next?-- the Church is moving.- and as she has always been the hardest thing on earth - to stir,- we may take it for granted that the rest of the world is moving also.- Now where are we all going?- is beginning to be asked,- and the failure to answer the question and dread of uncertainty keeps many people nervously clinging to the rushes along the bank,- in the hope of checking their progress.- Having given up so much in which they implicitly believed,- they are anxiously inquiring - what is truth.-- How much must be taken from us - and what shall be left ~~us~~,- Where is the absolute and eternal truth of which neither time nor change shall rob us?-- Or is there no such truth,- and must the skeptical tendencies of the age - land us in the blankest infidelity & atheism?--

In a slower way - & on a grander scale the life of the generation is only the counterpart of individual lifes,- and we can come no nearer a correct answer of these questions than in finding where these tendencies have landed representative persons.—

You will notice that whoever breaks away from what they have long regarded as the ultimate authority— are at first as positive as ever in asserting certain ideas.— They may come to regard all the doctrines of tradition— as erroneous— and unworthy belief— but still they set up in their place doctrines which accord with their own reason.— and hold to their positive truth as strenuously as they ever did to the old.— The liberal orthodox of to day— has a different belief from his fathers.— one that more nearly satisfies his reason.— but like his fathers— he is entirely certain that he has found the absolute truth.— So many of the liberals out side ~~the church~~ the citadel of orthodoxy— are as well assured of the absolute

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right of their position - and as ready to cry bigot against all who differ from them. - as any the most zealous adherents of the church. -

It is ~~most supremely~~ sometimes a little ludicrous to find ~~those~~ ~~one~~ who differs just a shade from orthodoxy - upon some one or two particular points. talking in such ~~tiny~~ ~~&~~ a superior and patronizing way. - about church bigotry & prejudice. - ~~To set them on~~ when simply by touching upon some point which they regard ~~some point - which they regard as little~~ a little heretical. you can ~~heretical. - and you~~ provoke a display of ~~all~~ just [illegible] to so ~~the venom which they~~ laboriously lament in other people. --- But the first creed which people frame ~~a creed for~~ for themselves, - though for the time being - they endorse it as heartily as ever they did the creed of their forefathers - soon gives way to another - and that to another, - just so often as their mental condition changes, - with the things they once held as true slip by them - and they find themselves taking new and unexpected positions. -- And with each change – the horizon of uncertainties will widen – and the little rock of absolute and unquestioned truth upon which he stands, seem to decrease. The thirty nine articles will at length dwindle to one or two – and even these will threaten to crumble beneath his feet. – – Imagine a child born in the heart of some little rocky Island – far out from the mainland. Suppose the child grown up to years of understanding – without having once seen the ocean being religiously kept from it – and knowing nothing of it save through the vague reports which now & then reached his ears from ~~the~~ the sailors with whom he was not – ~~a class with which he was not to~~ allowed to associate. – With childhoods habit for magnifying all its immediate surroundings he would suppose the sea to be a very small affair – and the solid ground upon which he stood to stretch away to untold distances. – – But one day he escapes his watchful friends. - driven by a new hunger to know what other lands the sun shines on. -- He climbs the hill which overlooks his native village - and over its brow he catches a glimpse of the little landlocked harbor - and beyond a strip of deeper blue than the sky - across which ships are gliding. That then must be the sea. - and it cuts off the land in that direction. -- Wondering what could induce men to go out upon the treacherous deep - when the solid earth is so broad. - he goes on still higher. -- The next hill gained shows him the ocean upon his right. - He begins to think the land may not be so large as he supposed. - Still there are the great hills behind him. - It must be that, that way the sea does not encroach. - Once more up and this time his astonished eyes behold the ocean upon his left. - The unfathomable sea surrounds him on three sides. - He dreads to take another step - lest it show him [illegible] the waters upon the fourth. - But the desire to know his surroundings will not be stifled. - He cannot choose but climb the highest pinnacle. - - - And what does he discover? - He finds himself upon the summit of a mere speck of land - which lifts him above the broad bosom of the heaving ocean. - The great billows bear down upon him from every quarter - and thunder at the base of the cliff upon which he stands. - as though they were about to wash it out of existence. -

Well may he sink down cowed - & afraid - hardly daring to lift his voice - lest the waters of the great deep rush up & cover him. -

Then one of two things will happen. - Either he will rise up - and look old ocean in the face - till a sense of its grandeur wakes within him; - a faith and courage which makes him long to find himself out ~~amidst~~ amidst its - wild play - or he will run terror stricken back into the valley — sigh for his old delusions — and strive to forget what he has seen. —

This is a singularly faithful picture — of the progress of skeptical people — and therefore will serve to illustrate the result of a skeptical age. —

What men learn by questioning and exploring in any direction — be it through science or religion — is as nothing — when compared with the vast ocean of mystery which is disclosed to their view. — The end of all our striving is to find how little we are — how little we know — how small and insecure the footing upon which we stand. — We have seen men distinguished for the boldness & freedom of their thought — when they have reached this point — and been forced to look into the face of an all embracing mystery — turn and fly back to the traditions of the past. — trying to rely so implicitly upon what they ~~have found~~ once known to be mere human authority — as to quiet their fears by cheating themselves into the belief that they have found the bridge which connects them with the Eternal. -- We have seen others sustain themselves by a faith that this mystery is everywhere pervaded by law and love. - so that they can trust themselves upon its bosom without a fear. - (and contenting themselves with now & then a pearl out of its depths. - believing that in God's own Good time the hidden treasure shall be more fully revealed) —— - One of these two things will probably ~~happen to society~~ grow out of the present condition of society. - Either its skepticism will at last send it back appalled, into the night of superstition, or a purer & clearer faith in the essential goodness of the Universe will spring up in the minds of men. - and lead them to trust where they confess they cannot know. — The one would mean death to every form of progress - the other would warrant & sustain a

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continued growth of the human mind - until a nearer approach to perfection - should bring a closer approximation to the absolutely true. -

So much then as to where this sceptical tendency - which the character of Pilate embodies - must ~~is~~ land us; - But still his question what is truth? - remains unanswered. - The only answer we can give - is that - if we are searching for truth - which can be unquestionably proved - we shall find nothing of the sort within the limits of human ken. - The whole imposing structure of science is founded upon a faith - which no more rests on proof - than the earth rests upon solid foundations. - What right has science to talk of universal laws - when she has only a few facts at command. - I should not be surprised if one day the tables were turned and religion stood as the skeptic - asking science to give an account of her faith. - But no continued growth of the human mind until a nearer approach to perfection should bring a closer approximation to t absolutely true -

Between these two alternatives who cannot prophesy the future? - Even the faith which notwithstanding the scientific tendencies of the age - nay through those very tendencies - asserts itself more clearly. Even a faith in the Omnipotent beneficence of love - unsupported by evidence - would convince us that the impulse the rather toward progress & light. - But we have evidence - as day after day representative minds discard authority - and find new joy & peace in sounding for themselves the mysteries of life. - It is only here & there the exceptional one, who having known the ~~uncertainty~~ instability of a free condition, prefers the security of custody.

the many who have parted their cables
and set their sail for a voyage of
discovery - or learning to love that life
for its own sake. - though their keel
never grate upon that strand of [illegible]
truth for which they search. -

What is truth? I know not, the
age shall answer. - It is that I seek. -
With eager eyes questioning the horizon
of my thoughts - I look for the looming
outline of that rock of ages - which
shall be a beacon to all my goings
out - & comings in. - - What is the
truth - Ah! that is the cry which fills
my soul, - the divine instinct of the
needle which points my way across the
heaving waters toward the absolute, -
the little rift in the clouds - which
fills my heart with the joy of a coming
haven. - All which drives me forward

that conception
or more or so — is ~~the particular~~
that form of the truth with which I am [illegible]
~~thing which I hold as truth today.~~ —

Of the morrow I take no thought, but will stand ready to welcome any change which gives promise of a closer approach to life as it is in God. —

Now is it not apparent that an age which could render these answers would be in substantial accord with Christ? — As a type of mind it matters not so much what particular thing he affirmed — as that he affirmed the truth — out of his own consciousness. I read the significance of his example in the fact that he bowed to no authority under heaven — as against his conviction of the true & the right. — And he himself cannot be made an authority for others without a similar destruction of the same,

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genius of his life.-- We may desire a more or less literal accordance with the precepts he taught.-- but the essential thing is a union in spirit with him.- a union in which we take upon ourselves his view of duty as a child of God.- to live above our own conditions of the earth.- Thus do I understand the old injunction to "Leave the world" -- and in these days - when many people would rather be seemingly fanatical than worldly,- I think they would better understand if they were enjoined, not to leave - but to affirm more.-

This is a lesson which the age is rapidly learning - even through its skepticism - & it is hence becoming in the true sense of the word more Christian - Through whatever means - and under whatever names -- the individual is everywhere learning - with reverence for the past - yet with outspoken candor toward the present - to ~~judge~~ speak & fulfill his or her own judgement of the right - and this do I call growing into the spirit of the Master.-

What is all this negation which is so much deplored:- What ~~is the intent~~ shall be the result of all this tearing away of established things.-- Not what is the intent of ~~those who~~ these Pilates of today.- who are crucifying the inner light.- That is not the question- for it has happened that almost all earnest workers have been blind instruments of a higher power.- Whatever these negations mean to the mind who make them.- all this warfare upon revelation & tradition - is only a protest against infallibility.-- The negation, is of any measure of absolute truth - to which men shall be conformed - and in that negation - is an implied affirmation - which shall soon be uttered with unprecedented distinctness an affirmation that every soul is born like Jesus - to bear witness unto the truth. - Not to blindly believe what authority shall say. - But to affirm by its own conscience - that this thing is true for it. - opens its only door to the perfect - & absolute

It is then only an apparent divergence from Christ which the age manifests. - Whether churches stand or fall - and whatever particular beliefs may withstand the fire of criticism now turned upon them - We are coming into that day of liberty for which Christ labored - & growing into that spirit ~~for which~~ of independence - for which he stands in in history

Though in the process we lose the faith in the absolute verity of our ideas - still nothing can make them seem less true while we hold them. - And in any event - we have left us this faith that we shall only get to the Eternal truth at length by offering heartily what is to day given us to believe - and that when we do come to Know as God Knows - we shall find the truth infinitely grander & more comforting - than are even our most Cherished hopes. - -